

100 YEARS OF KIBBUTZ - NOW WHAT AND FOR WHAT?

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The 100th anniversary celebration of kibbutz, held in Degania on Oct. 4, 2010 and the special session of the Israeli parliament marking the anniversary recognized the seminal role the kibbutz played in the Zionist movement and in the establishment of the state. Significantly, the emphasis was on past achievements. Focus on the future was avoided. The facts on the ground are that many Israelis view the kibbutz as an anachronistic icon.

Currently, one-quarter of the kibbutz movement is collective. In the last twenty years, the rest have opted for differential wages and have, in effect, become a class society. There is no longer a kibbutz "movement". The "movement" is an organization of kibbutzim whose function is to further common (mainly economic and legal) interests.

Significantly, kibbutzim - including most of the collective kibbutzim- are no longer **intentional communities**. In the beginning, the intention of the kibbutzim was to pioneer a community based value-world which, *in micro*, would point the way and lead to the value world of future Israeli society *in macro*. The kibbutzim drew ideological inspiration both from the prophetic tradition of social justice in the Jewish heritage as well as from various streams of socialism current at the beginning of the 20th century. True, the kibbutzim were also the willing handmaidens of the Zionist establishment in creating an agricultural and military infrastructure for the nascent state. This was critically important for Israel's establishment to which the kibbutzim saw themselves as full partners. However, it was not the ultimate purpose of the kibbutzim.

The state of Israel exists. The spirit of the times in the Western world (very much including Israel) is post-modern, neo-liberal and focuses on individual self-fulfillment rather than the collective good. Yes, there is a back-lash. The evidence is the emergence of city kibbutzim and communes in Israel which see themselves as intentional communities impacting on the social and geographic periphery of Israeli society.

On November 17th - 18th, the collective stream of the kibbutz movement met in Israel's far South where kibbutzim constitute a bastion of the collective spirit and ideology. The motto chosen for the convention was "The Next Hundred Years of Collective Cooperation". The collective stream declared itself to be an "autonomous union" within the kibbutz movement. Will the crack lead to a split?

Stay tuned. The jury of history is still out on the verdict of "now what and for what" will the kibbutz be in the 21st Century!

